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First Workshop for Mahouts and Paramedics about Elephant Medical Management Conducted in Sumatra

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About 300 Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*) are housed in elephant training centres throughout Sumatra, and about another 250 are housed in zoos, safari parks, logging companies and conservation NGOs throughout Indonesia. A lack of veterinary care in many of these facilities is due to insufficient funds, equipment and laboratory facilities.

In facilities where veterinarians are available, the quality of medical management depends very much on the support and cooperation of mahouts, paramedics and camp managers. In facilities were no veterinarians are available, or only visit occasionally, almost all medical management and procedures are performed by the mahouts and paramedics themselves. Therefore, to improve health management of captive Sumatran elephants it is very important to build knowledge amongst mahouts, paramedics and camp managers about the needs and uses of various medical procedures, and how to perform them.

To address this issue, the Sumatran Mahout Association (Forum Komunikasi Mahout Sumatra/FOKMAS) together with the Way Kambas National Park, conducted a workshop for mahouts and paramedics to increase knowledge about general medical management needs and basic techniques of laboratory diagnostics for elephant medical management.

The first workshop for mahouts and paramedics was conducted from 23. - 26. June 2008, at the Way Kambas Elephant Training Centre in southern Sumatra. This workshop was enabled by technical and financial support from the Veterinary Society for Sumatran Wildlife Conservation (Vesswic), International Elephant Foundation (IEF), and elephant family (ef).

The workshop was attended by 44 participants representing all elephant training centres in Sumatra, as well as zoos, safari parks and NGOs from Sumatra, Java and Bali.



The opening speech was given by the Director of the Directorate of Biodiversity and Species Conservation of the Agency for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (KKH/ PHKA). Presentations about the general role and importance of paramedics and mahouts for elephant health management were given by speakers from the Indonesian Veterinary Association (PDHI).

A qualified wildlife veterinary technician from the Indianapolis Zoo (USA) was invited by IEF to assist with the workshop. The veterinary technician conducted lectures and practical demonstrations about storing, shipping, processing and evaluating blood, faeces and urine samples, as well as handling, storing, and maintaining a stock of medical equipment, drugs, and supplies. A written manual about all these issues was prepared for distribution to the participants.

Veterinarians from the Vesswic Elephant Health Care Program conducted lectures about basic elephant anatomy and physiology; major diseases in elephants and how they relate to laboratory findings; techniques for collecting blood, faeces and urine samples; and basic treatment schemes and techniques including calculating drug dosages. Vesswic staff also led practical demonstrations about collecting samples of



blood, faeces, and urine from elephants, as well as drug administration.

The workshop resulted in increased knowledge and understanding amongst participating mahouts and paramedics of general elephant health care needs, treatment regimes, and laboratory diagnostics. The workshop also increased awareness about the need for improved elephant medical care amongst responsible Indonesian government authorities such as the Agency for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA), Directorate for Biodiversity and Species Conservation (KKH) and the Indonesian Veterinary Association (PDHI).

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